

DE-ESCALATING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Data for this presentation is from the “Dealing with Workplace Violence” handbook printed by the United States Office of Personnel Management, Feb 1998.

Motivation

- Many who have never experienced workplace violence say: “*I don’t need to worry about this. It would never happen in my office.*”
- **Violent incidents are relatively rare, but they do occur, and lives can be lost.**
- **A little preparation and investment in prevention now could save a life.**
- **There is no strategy that works for every situation, but the likelihood of a successful resolution is much greater if you have prepared ahead of time.**

Prevention

**Major component of any workplace violence
program**

***How can we identify potentially violent
individuals?***

Indicators of Potentially Violent Behavior

- **Direct or veiled threats of harm;**
- **Intimidating, belligerent, harassing, bullying, or other inappropriate and aggressive behavior;**
- **Numerous conflicts with supervisors and other employees;**
- **Bringing a weapon to the workplace, brandishing a weapon in the workplace, making inappropriate**

Indicators of Potentially Violent Behavior

- **Statements showing fascination with incidents of workplace violence, statements indicating approval of the use of violence to resolve a problem, or statements indicating identification with perpetrators of workplace homicides;**
- **Statements indicating desperation (over family, financial, and other personal problems) to the point of contemplating suicide;**

Indicators of Potentially Violent Behavior

- **Each of these behaviors is a clear sign that something is wrong.**
- **None should be ignored!**
- **By identifying the problem and dealing with it appropriately, managers may be able to prevent violence from happening.**

Employee Training

- **All employees should know how to report incidents of violent, intimidating, threatening and other disruptive behavior.**
- **All employees should also be provided with phone numbers for quick reference during a crisis or an emergency.**

Violence Prevention Training Topics for Employees

- **Explanation of the agency's workplace violence policy;**
- **Encouragement to report incidents;**
- **Ways to de-escalate volatile situations or aggressive behavior;**
- **Managing anger;**
- **Techniques and skills to resolve conflicts;**
- **Stress management, relaxation techniques, wellness training;**

Violence Prevention Training Topics for Employees

- **Note that many of the training topics are the same as the CO2 training topics!**
- **The same training that creates a healthy, productive workplace can also help prevent potentially violent situations.**
- **For further info on such topics as Anger Management, Stress Management, and Wellness Training, see our “Directorate of Health Promotion and Wellness” at**

Supervisor Training

- **Basic leadership skills such as setting clear standards, addressing employee problems promptly, and using the probationary period, performance counseling, discipline, and other management tools conscientiously.**
- **Supervisors don't need to be experts on violent behavior; what is needed is a willingness to seek advice from the experts.**

Violence Prevention Training Topics for Supervisors

- **Ways to encourage employees to report incidents in which they feel threatened for any reason by anyone inside or outside the organization,**
- **Skills in behaving compassionately and supportively towards employees who report incidents,**
- **Skills in taking disciplinary actions,**
- **Basic skills in handling crisis situations,**
- **Basic emergency procedures, and**

Conclusion

- **Prevention is the key to De-escalating Workplace Violence**
- **Our objective is to stop it before it starts**
- **Employees must recognize and report the “Indicators of Potentially Violent Behavior”**
- **Supervisors must respond appropriately to any employee reports**
- **Creating and maintaining a healthy, productive workplace is the best “preventive medicine” for workplace violence**

Situational Exercises

- **Based on real life situations that have arisen in Federal agencies**
- **There is no one correct way to handle each situation**
- **These situations should be a starting point for discussion**
- **Answer the questions for each situation and any others that arise**

Situation 1 - A Shooting

The report comes in: Two employees have been killed in the workplace and two have been wounded. A witness has called 911 and the police and ambulances have arrived. The perpetrator (an agency employee) has been taken into custody, the victims are being sent to the hospital, and the police are interviewing witnesses and gathering evidence.

Situation 1 -- Questions

- 1. How would employees be given information about this incident?**
- 2. Who would clean up the crime scene?**
- 3. Would you relocate employees who worked in the area of the crime scene?**
- 4. What approach should be taken regarding granting excused absence on the day of the incident and requests for leave in the days/weeks following the incident?**
- 5. How should management deal with work normally assigned to the victims/perpetrator?**
- 6. What support would supervisors need to get**

Situation 2 - Beating and Wounding a Coworker

A female employee had broken off a romantic relationship with a male co-worker, but he wouldn't leave her alone. She finally had a restraining order served to him. After receiving the restraining order, the perpetrator lost control and entered the woman's office. He hit her; she fell from her chair. While she was on the floor, he broke a soda bottle and cut her face with the broken glass. While this was going on, co-workers heard the commotion and called the police. The perpetrator fled the scene

Situation 2 -- Questions

- 1. Who should monitor the proceedings of the criminal case, e.g., to be aware of the situation if the perpetrator got out of jail on bail or probation?**
- 2. Who should track local law enforcement activities in these type of cases?**
- 3. Who will clean up the scene of an incident after investigators are finished examining it?**
- 4. Do employees at your agency know who to call in an emergency — for example, 911, the Federal Protective Service, in-house security, or in-house law enforcement?**

Situation 3 -A Suicide Attempt

**A fellow coworker just left your office
muttering about “the final straw — you all
won’t have me to push around any more.”
It’s obvious now that this person has been
contemplating suicide for a few weeks._**

Situation 3 -- Questions

- 1. What would you do? Who would you call?**
- 2. Have employees with skills in handling emergencies been identified?**
- 3. Are you encouraged to report problems/incidents at an early stage?**
- 4. Would you report problems that trouble your co-workers even if you don't fully understand the nature of their problem?**
- 5. If a troubled employee left the building before emergency personnel arrived, who would contact the appropriate authorities?**

Situation 4 - Stalking

A co-worker broke up with her boyfriend a year ago and he's been stalking her ever since. He calls her several times a week (she hangs up immediately). He shows up wherever she goes on the weekends and just stares at her from a distance. He often parks his car down the block from her home and just sits there. He's made it known he has a gun.

Situation 4 -- Questions

- 1. What should be done to ensure the safety of the workplace in this case?**
- 2. How would you deal with coworkers were too afraid of the stalker to work in the same office with the employee?**
- 3. Assuming the stalker goes to jail, what should be done when the stalker gets out?**
- 4. Would your Office of Inspector General have gotten involved in this case, e.g., coordinated agency efforts with local**

Situation 5 - Domestic Violence

You just finished a long conversation with a friend and co-worker, a part-time employee, who revealed that she is a victim of domestic violence. To your surprise, you learn that the woman's husband has been abusing her since their first child was born. He is careful to injure her only in ways that do not leave visible signs, and she feels sure no one would ever believe her word against his. The family's assets, even "her" car, are all in his name, and her part-time salary would not be enough for herself and the

Situation 5 - Questions

- 1. What advice would you give to someone in this situation?**
- 2. Where would you go for advice/counseling about domestic violence?**
- 3. How would you support co-workers in this type of situation?**
- 4. Would you gather information about restraining/protective orders to discuss with the battered employee the pros**

Situation 6 - Threat

During a break with one of your colleagues from down the hall, an employee was reported to have said, “I like the way some employees handle problems with their supervisors — they eliminate them. One of these days I’m going to bring in my gun and take care of my problem.”

Situation 6 - Questions

- 1. Do you think that this was a threat and not just a joke?**

- 2. Would you report the threat?**

- 3. Who would you report the threat to?**

- 4. What action should be taken against the worker who made the threat?**

Situation 7 - Veiled Threats

An employee tells the supervisor that “I know where your kids go to school.” This same employee has also made the following statement: “If you give me that assignment, you’ll be sorry.”

Situation 7 - Questions

- 1. How would you interpret these statements?**
- 2. What action should be taken against the employee?**
- 3. What action should the supervisor take?**

Situation 8 - A Threat

A visibly upset male employee cornered a female employee in her office, and said quietly and slowly that she will pay with her life for going over his head to ask about his work. The male employee then stared at his co-worker with his hands clenched rigidly at this side before leaving the office and slamming the door behind him.

Situation 8 - Questions

- 1. Is this a serious situation?**

- 2. What should the threatened employee do?**

- 3. What action should be taken against the employee making the threat?**

- 4. What should the supervisor do?**

- 5. What steps should the threatened employee take if her supervisor doesn't take her report seriously?**

Situation 9 - A Threat with Disturbing Behavior

The employee was in a talkative mood and began to reminisce about his career — first his early successes, then recent disappointments, such as being passed over repeatedly for promotions and failure to receive any type of recognition. As he continued, he revealed in a matter-of-fact tone that he had been spending his evenings planning revenge on his managers because they had treated him unfairly for many years and they deserved to be punished. He believed he had planned the “perfect murder” and that he would never be caught. He

Situation 9 - Questions

- 1. Is this a serious situation?**

- 2. What would you do with this information?**

- 3. What action should be taken against the employee making the threat?**

- 4. What should the supervisors do?**

- 5. What steps should the employee take if the supervisors don't take this situation seriously?**

Situation 10 - Alleged Threats

A supervisor is told by one employee (alleged victim) that another employee (alleged perpetrator) has been intimidating him with his “in your face” behavior. The alleged perpetrator has stood over the alleged victim’s desk in what he perceived as a menacing way, physically crowded him out in an elevator, and made menacing gestures. The alleged perpetrator is an average performer, somewhat of a loner, but with no known behavior problems until this employee expressed his fear. The alleged victim told the supervisor that he did not

Situation 10 - Questions

- 1. Is this a serious situation?**

- 2. What should the allegedly threatened employee do?**

- 3. What action should be taken against the employee making the threat?**

- 4. What should the supervisor do?**

- 5. What steps should the threatened employee take if the supervisor doesn't take his report seriously?**

Situation 11 - Frightening Behavior

A fellow employee was recently divorced and has been going through a difficult time for over two years and has made it clear that he was having financial problems which were causing him to be stressed out. He was irritable and aggressive in his speech much of the time. He would routinely talk about the number of guns he owned, not in the same sentence, but in the same general conversation in which he would mention

Situation 11 - Questions

- 1. Is this a serious situation?**

- 2. What should the employees do?**

- 3. What should the supervisors do?**

- 4. What should be done with the employee displaying the frightening behavior?**

- 5. What should be done if the your fellow employees and supervisors don't take this behavior seriously and think it's just a joke?**

Situation 12 - Disruptive Behavior

A senior worker shouts and makes demeaning remarks to the other employees. He twists words around and manipulates situations to his advantage. For example, when employees ask him for advice on a topic in his area of expertise, he tells them to use their own common sense. Then when they finished the assignment, he makes demeaning remarks about them and speaks loudly about how they did their work the wrong way. At other times, he rudely demands in a loud voice that they drop whatever they are working on and help him with his project. The

Situation 12 - Questions

- 1. Is this a serious situation?**

- 2. What should the employees do?**

- 3. What should the supervisor do?**

- 4. What action should be done with the employee displaying the disruptive behavior?**

THE END
